



Bordering the Monster? “Creative Destruction” and De- and Re-Bordering of Established Structures/Borders. Alexander Drost/Maare Paloheimo, International Research Training Group 1540/2 “Baltic Borderlands: Shifting Boundaries of Mind and Culture in the Baltic Sea Region” (DFG), Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald, 19.10.2014—21.10.2014.

Reviewed by Alexander Drost

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (February, 2015)

Bordering the Monster? “Creative Destruction” and De- and Re-Bordering of Established Structures/Borders

The annual conference of the International Research Training Group (IRTG) “Baltic Borderlands” (Ernst-Moritz-Arndt-Universität Greifswald), organized by Alexander Drost (Greifswald) and Maare Paloheimo (Greifswald), challenged once again the predominantly territorially perceived concept of borders by applying the ideas of “monsters” and “creative destruction” to bordering processes. In international and interdisciplinary panels researchers discussed how the new and incomprehensible Other, for instance embodied in the trope of monstrosity, could potentially redefine and re-draw boundaries and borders, giving a way to changes in established structures.

The conference started with a keynote lecture by SAMUEL TRUETT (Albuquerque). In his presentation, Truett presented a story of 19th century globetrotters who travelled across the US-Mexico border and settled on both sides of the borderland. Focusing on mixed identities of “global” strangers, the speaker raised a question of the importance of the micro-historical approach for the understanding of how borderlands combine local and transnational modes of history. He argued that biographies of “strangers” who embodied hybridity of a monster were an important source for the analysis of the ambiguity of such liminal spaces as borderlands.

MARTA GRZECHNIK (Gdansk/Greifswald) contin-

ued the historical path taken in the keynote lecture. She reconstructed the figure of a monster in post-WWII Polish historiography. According to Grzechnik’s presentation, in the texts and debates of Polish historians Germans were to replace Russians in being the Other for the Polish national imagination. Although Poland was separated from “monstrous” Germans by the political border during the Cold War, the symbolical importance of the alien neighbor for the Polish national identity could hardly be overestimated.

RUNE BRANDT LARSEN (Lund) paid attention to another well-known “stranger” of the Polish national narrative, notably the Russian neighbor constructed as the barbaric, despotic and savage threat to European civilization. According to other papers, this monstrous depiction of Russia spread beyond the boundaries of Polish historiography. In his presentation, MADIS MAASING (Tartu) restored how the idea of the Russian threat (analogous to the motif of the Turkish threat, which was widespread in Europe in the 15th century) emerged in 16th century Livonia and was used as a propaganda tool to justify various political activities, even those that had nothing to do with Russia. The persistence of a monstrous perception of Russia went through 19th century Estonia and Latvia. As TOOMAS SCHVAK (Tartu) showed, the mass conversions of peasantry into Russian Orthodoxy in these countries had local elites considering this process

as an invasion of a monster tearing up well-established social order and the borders protecting it. NICHOLAS PRINDIVILLE (Helsinki/Greifswald) traced the idea of monstrous Russia in the contemporary Finnish historiography on WWII and demonstrated the perpetual importance of Russia as the eternal Other for the Finnish national identity until today.

SUNE BECHMANN PEDERSEN (Lund) claimed that the metaphor of the monster was not always a useful way for depicting the Other. Departing from his analysis of Scandinavian guidebooks about Eastern Europe during the Cold War, Pedersen argued that the representation of repressive aspects of daily life in communist countries was close to nothing in those touristic guides. Instead, the guidebooks stressed the normality and authenticity of touristic experience in such countries as Czechoslovakia, Romania and Bulgaria where the touristic sector was presumably less influenced by mass consumption.

The monstrous figures are important metaphors in art and literature. As CYNTHIA OSIECKI (Greifswald) maintained in her paper, in medieval art they had had a significant moral meaning. As she argued, the depiction of animals in art in the Middle Ages corresponded with medieval bestiaries. On the one hand, the figures of monstrous animals were to teach Christians what sinful behavior was. On the other hand, the belief of medieval theologians that humans and animals were the creation of God left a space for positive interpretation of some animalistic figures whose depiction was associated with goodness and heaven.

KATJA WILL (Greifswald) analyzed portrayal of monsters in contemporary Danish cinema. More precisely, she focused on the metaphor of cannibalism in the Danish movie *The Green Butchers*. As Will argued, cannibalism had long served as metaphorical depiction of dichotomy between civilized/non-civilized. Although the facts of cannibalism have been poorly documented throughout history, their mentioning had often been used for the symbolization of evil, alien and non-understandable elements of other cultures. In *The Green Butchers*, however, cannibalism took place within the Danish society. Representation of the transgression of the strongest alimentary taboo in the small Danish town where all inhabitants got involved into cannibalistic practices could be seen as a metaphor of cannibalization of the time and emergence of the new social structure.

BERIT GLANZ (Greifswald) turned to the monstrous figures in Scandinavian literature. Analyzing novels by

the Icelandic author Sjöfn and the Norwegian writer Erik Fosnes Hansen, Glanz underlined that the figure of the monster became a popular motif in contemporary Scandinavian fiction. The metaphor of the monster served as a social critique directed at the Otherness of sick people who were treated as aliens by their social environment.

The alien elements of culture embodied in the metaphor of monstrosity often serve as a stimulus for creative destruction. This concept goes back to Joseph Schumpeter's (1883–1950) ideas of economic innovation and business cycles. Three conference papers applied it to the analysis of the economic development in the Baltic Sea region in the 18–20th centuries.

MATTHIAS MÄLLER (Greifswald) argued that the population of 18th century Swedish Pomerania perceived the expansion of gambling as a monstrous development. He suggested that the people's attitude to a new lottery format (*Lotto di Genova*), which arose in the 18th century and presumably advantaged gamblers and entrepreneurs, could serve as a metaphor of anxieties determined by the establishment of a new social order in the result of the creative destruction.

Following a similar line, MAARE PALOHEIMO (Greifswald) considered how the idea of the Russian threat in Finnish national imagination went hand in hand with the acknowledgment of the importance of economic relations with Russia and with the dependency of Finnish business life on Russian markets in the early 19th century. The growing presence of Russian merchants was seen as the menace to a closed and tightly knit merchant community in Finland. At the same time, the clash of different economic cultures led to a competitive situation in commerce and certain industries. In this way, Paloheimo argued, the disturbing Russian newcomers could be understood as a source of creative destruction for the 19th century Finnish economy.

The keynote speaker JARI OJALA (Jyväskylä) theoretically summed up the importance of creative destruction for economic life cycles. Focusing on the historical development of organizations, Ojala argued that creative destruction had been an inalienable part of the organizational life cycle throughout the 19–20th century. The essence of creative destruction lied in the fact that it could be perceived not as a monstrous invasion of alien and frightening elements into the economic structure but as a window of opportunities and a source of organizational survival.

Addressing the concepts of monstrosity and cre-

ative destruction, the conference contributed to a non-dogmatic understanding of bordering practices. It challenged the dichotomic interpretation of the process of Othering as “We” versus “They” construction, revealing its ambiguity and complexity. The metaphor of a monster exposes two mutually dependent ways of thinking about the Other. It embodies the experience of fear and incomprehension in dealing with Otherness, but at the same time demonstrates how this experience may serve as a way of ‘creative destruction’, i.e. a revitalization of already established and settled structures.

Conference Overview:

Alexander Drost (Greifswald), Introduction

Key Note I

Introduction by Michael North (Greifswald)
Samuel Truett (Albuquerque), Globetrotters, border crossers, and the tangled tales of borderlands history

Panel I

Collaborative Discussant and Chair: Barbara Törnqvist-Plewa (Lund) / Alexander Wåhl (Greifswald)

Marta Grzechnik (Gdansk/Greifswald), Ten centuries of struggling with the monster. The Germans as the “Other” in the post-Second World War Polish historiography

Rune Brandt Larsen (Lund), Shadows in the East

Sune Bechmann Pedersen (Lund), Eastern escapes: Selling communist Europe in Scandinavian cold-war guidebooks

Panel II

Collaborative Discussant and Chair: Barbara Törnqvist-Plewa (Lund) / Alexander Wåhl (Greifswald)

Alberto Sevillano (Greifswald), The discovery of a *Monstrous Goya* in Germany in early 20th century

Katja Will (Greifswald), Everybody a man-eater? The Danish film “De gråne slagtere” and the motif of cannibalism

Berit Glanz (Greifswald), Monstrous patients: Alterity in contemporary Scandinavian novels

Panel III

Discussant and Chair: Jens E. Olesen (Greifswald)

Madis Maasing (Tartu), Monsters on the border of

Christendom: The Russian threat in 16th-Century Livonia

Baiba Tetere (Greifswald), “Latvian types”: Hybridized visions of rural life in Latvia in the 1890s

Toomas Schvak (Tartu), De- and Re-bordering in 19th century Estonia and Latvia: Orthodox Church and schools as enablers of social changes

Key Note II

Introduction by Riho Altnurme (Tartu)

Jari Ojala (Jyväskylä), Creative destruction, path dependence and organizational longevity: how and why history matters?

Forum

Collaborative Chair: Olga Sasunkevich (Vilnius) / Alexander Drost (Greifswald)

Alexandra Fried (Gothenburg), The Bunge master- reconsidered

Opponent: Kilian Heck (Greifswald)

Inge Christensen (Greifswald), Visions of Western depravity and bourgeois hedonism in a post-soviet setting

Opponent: Bo Petersson (Malmö)

Elisabeth Heigl (Greifswald), Incompetent professors? The deconstruction of the economic autonomy of the University of Greifswald in the second half of the 18th century

Opponent: Andreas Ånnerfors (Malmö)

Mihkel Mõesalu (Tartu), Livonia’s (un)involvement in the Hussite Wars (1419-1434). The reaction of an established borderland to the emergence of a new enemy in the center

Opponent: Mathias Niendorf (Greifswald)

Cynthia Osiecki (Greifswald), Hells angels or the devil for dummies? Depictions of hell in medieval sculpture

Opponent: Anti Selart (Tartu)

Panel IV

Discussant and Chair: Jan-Henrik Nilsson (Lund)

Maare Paloheimo (Greifswald), The emergence and assimilation of Russian-born businessmen in early-nineteenth-century Finland

Sebastian Nickel (Greifswald), The mercurial mon-

ster: Re-bordering migration routes from Sub-Saharan Africa to the EU

Matthias Moller (Greifswald), *The monsters of luck: Lottery as a threat to the traditional order in the eighteenth century*

Nicholas Prindiville (Helsinki/Greifswald), Finland's Trolls: Johan Backman and the Finnish Anti-Fascist Committee as Dissidents of Finnish Historiography

Closing Remarks: Stephan Kessler (Greifswald)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Alexander Drost. Review of , *Bordering the Monster? "Creative Destruction" and De- and Re-Bordering of Established Structures/Borders*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. February, 2015.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=43448>

Copyright  2015 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.